

Driven to serve



Ted Powell (right), a World War II and Korean War veteran, arrives at this VA medical appointment thanks to Jeff Paul (left), a volunteer driver for the DAV Transportation Network. Drivers like Paul help transport veterans to and from appointments to ensure they get the health care they earned and deserve.

DAV volunteers help ensure veterans' medical needs are met

It's a chilly, sunny morning as Jeff Paul heads out on a special mission in a DAV Ford Flex. He is volunteering his time to help veterans in his Missouri community. The mission: Drive veterans to and from their health care appointments to ensure their needs are taken care of.

He may be picking up a Silver Star recipient who served during the Vietnam War. He may be picking up an amputee who served in Iraq. Whomever Paul is picking up, they are veterans who need

help getting the health care they have earned and deserve.

One of those veterans is World War II and Korean War veteran Ted Powell. Today, he'll make it to his appointment thanks to Paul and the DAV Transportation Network. Powell is unable to drive now, so he depends on volunteers like Paul to help him take care of his medical needs.

As Powell is stepping out his front door, Paul is there to greet him. Somewhat frail, he walks slowly toward the vehicle as Paul walks with him. The program is a lifeline for veterans like Powell. But the need for more drivers is critical.

Nationwide, volunteerism for veterans is on a gradual, unfortunate decline. As baby boomers work longer and lead busier lives, the mantle left behind by members of the Greatest Generation has not fully been inherited.

"We're still doing great things—still providing hundreds of thousands of rides every year—but while the need is as prevalent as ever, it's difficult to get the volunteers we need to provide a lifeline to these deserving veterans who otherwise might not get the care they deserve," said National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. "Fortunately, the people who are involved see the value and seem to get as much out of helping as do the heroes they assist."

"I really appreciate what Jeff does for us," said Powell. "When I found out I was going to have a lot of medical appointments, I didn't know what I was going to do. I found out about this program from the VA, and now Jeff is here to help."

Paul is one of more than 13,000 patriotic Americans who give their time in the Transportation Network. In 2018, volunteers across the county gave more than 1.4 million hours of their time, logging in over 17 million miles transporting veterans to VA medical centers and facilities. But not all of the needs are met, and volunteers like Paul who consistently contribute

to the program are more important than ever.

He began volunteering in 2013, several months after he retired from nearly three decades with the Missouri State Police. Paul was still getting used to not working, and though he and his wife were enjoying the free time, he was beginning to feel a need to fill his days. On the interstate one day, he saw the distinctive DAV logo on a van and got involved. After completing a physical and training, he hit the road.

His passengers have served in all eras, from World War II to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One time, he even transported a Battle of the Bulge veteran who'd earned a Bronze Star.

"Talking with the veterans, especially ones I transport often, makes every drive memorable," said Paul. "We talk about everything, and I love to hear their stories about their days in the military.

"I love helping veterans and giving back," he added. "This gives me a sense of purpose again since I retired. As a state trooper and a criminal investigator, I was always on a mission. There was a great feeling of accomplishment after solving a case. Now, when I help veterans and get them to and from their appointments, it feels like accomplishing a mission."

His enthusiasm for volunteering even inspired three fellow state trooper retirees to become DAV Transportation Network drivers.

"Veterans depend on generous people like Jeff who give their time and even push others to get involved," said National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "You don't have to volunteer three times a week to get involved—even though we appreciate those who do. Every ride we provide meets an important need. We just need the folks who are willing to step forward."

Learn More

For more information on becoming a Transportation Network volunteer, email vavs@dav.org. Also visit VolunteerForVeterans.org to find opportunities to help veterans with everyday tasks.